

COVID-19 Vaccine: Additional Dose

GENERAL FAQs: Additional Dose of COVID-19 Vaccine for Immune Compromised

Subject Line: **Additional Dose of COVID-19 Vaccine for Immune Compromised**

Why are additional doses of COVID-19 vaccine recommended?

Some people may not have responded as well to the first doses of the COVID-19 vaccine. There is increasing data telling us that many of the severe breakthrough COVID-19 cases (infections after vaccine) are happening in people with some types of “moderate to severe” immune compromise. There is also data showing that people with certain types of immune compromise make less antibodies in response to the COVID-19 vaccine, which is a sign that their body may have responded less well, and they may not be as well protected by the initial vaccination.

Are the additional doses safe?

Trials have now shown that it is safe to get an additional dose of the following vaccines for some individuals with immune-compromise: Pfizer-BioNTech (12 years and older) and Moderna COVID-19 (18 years and older) vaccines.

I am immunocompromised. How do I schedule my additional vaccine dose?

VHA will be working to contact individuals who received the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine **and** are in a group that has been identified as having moderate to severe immune compromise. If you have not been contacted, but have moderate to severe immune compromise and would like to schedule an additional vaccine dose, you may:

- Message your PACT or clinical care team.
- Call your local VA or provider.

Some sites may be offering walk-in clinics for additional COVID-19 doses. Please see your local VA site for details.

What if I am not sure whether I have a specific medical condition or am immune compromised?

If you received a Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine and are not sure if you have one of the specific medical conditions or have a similar level of immune compromise to the conditions listed above, please ask your medical team before scheduling for an additional dose of vaccine. You can also check CDC guidance published in CDCs [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report \(MMWR\)](#) and on the [Interim Clinical Considerations for Use of COVID-19 Vaccines | CDC](#).

How can I plan for my additional dose?

Talk to your provider first and make sure you are in the group who should receive an additional dose. Specific vaccine types may not be available at every location immediately and different vaccines may be given at different times, based on availability and safety planning, so it is important to confirm your initial vaccination type before you schedule your additional dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

I received a Janssen (Johnson and Johnson) COVID-19 vaccine. Should I get an additional dose?

Due to insufficient data, the amendment for additional dose does not apply to Janssen. This does not mean an additional dose of Janssen is not safe, it simply means there is not enough data at this time, which is why Janssen is not included.

Do I need to have the same vaccine type that I had for my initial shots for my additional doses?

Yes. CDC and FDA recommend that your additional dose be of the same type, dose and manufacturer as your initial vaccine series. This means that if you received a Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine, you would receive an additional dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine; and if you received the Moderna vaccine, you would receive an additional dose of the Moderna vaccine.

What questions should I be prepared to answer prior to my additional dose appointment?

When you come for your vaccine visit, you may be asked if you have one of the following:

- Active treatment for solid tumor and hematologic malignancies (currently getting treatment, like chemotherapy, for cancer)
- Receipt of solid-organ transplant and taking immunosuppressive therapy
- Receipt of CAR-T-cell or hematopoietic stem cell transplant (within 2 years of transplantation or taking immunosuppression therapy)
- Moderate or severe primary immunodeficiency (these would be diagnosed by your medical team and often are conditions someone is born with - for example, DiGeorge, Wiskott-Aldrich syndromes)
- Advanced or untreated HIV infection (people with HIV who are not on treatment or who have a low CD4 count)
- Actively getting treatment with
 - high-dose corticosteroids (high dose is ≥ 20 mg prednisone or equivalent per day)
 - alkylating agents
 - antimetabolites
 - transplant-related immunosuppressive drugs

- cancer chemotherapeutic agents classified as severely immunosuppressive
- TNF blockers
- other biologic agents that are immunosuppressive or immunomodulatory

OR you may be asked if your medical team has told you that you have a similar level of immune compromise to the conditions listed above.

Do I need to show documentation that I have a specific medical condition or am immune compromised?

If you receive your care in VHA, we likely have this information in your medical record. If you do not receive care in VHA we will rely on your report of your conditions. If you received the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna COVID19 vaccines, please ask your primary health care team if you have questions about whether you have moderate or severe immune compromise and should get an additional COVID-19 vaccine dose to increase your level of protection.

Do I need to bring my vaccine card with me?

Yes, please bring your vaccine card or record so we can confirm that you received a Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine. If you did not receive your initial vaccine from VHA, we may not be able to give you an additional dose without seeing your card or record.

How long do I have to wait for an additional dose after my initial vaccine series with Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna vaccine?

CDC and FDA recommend a minimum interval of 28 days after you complete your initial vaccine series.

Who will be next to get additional or booster doses?

CDC, FDA, and others are following data carefully to see whether additional vaccine doses should be given to other individuals in the future, but this is not yet recommended. CDC is following closely to see who is at greatest risk from infection after an initial vaccine series. Vaccine manufacturers are also studying additional vaccines targeted against variant strains of COVID.

What if I received my vaccine through the SAVE LIVES ACT?

If you received vaccine from VHA through the SAVE LIVES Act but do not usually receive care in VHA, and you qualify for a third dose (you received a Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna vaccine, have moderate to severe immune compromise) and VA will vaccinate you with a third dose. To schedule an additional dose, contact your local VHA site for details and be sure to tell them what vaccine you previously received.

Can my spouse, (caregiver, CHAMP-VA recipient) get an additional dose at the same time as I do?

Yes, if they received a Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine and they have moderate to severe immune compromise, they should be eligible to receive an additional dose from VA under authority of the SAVE LIVES Act. It is important to have your initial vaccine record and to confirm that the clinic has the right vaccine in stock for your additional dose.

Will VA contact me?

We will be working to contact individuals if you received the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine AND are in a group that has been identified as having moderate to severe immune compromise in the category recommended by FDA and CDC for an additional dose.

If you have not been contacted but have significant immune compromise and would like to schedule your additional dose, please:

- Message your PACT team.

Is it safe to come into the medical center or clinic during the current COVID-19 surge? Should I avoid coming to the medical center?

Yes, but it is important to do everything to protect yourself from COVID-19 which includes an additional vaccine dose for some immunocompromised individuals. VA will continue to provide safe vaccination sites. You will be asked to mask and follow guidance on distancing while at your vaccine visit.